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II. — *The Etymological Meaning of Pomerium*

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IN any examination of the etymological meaning of *pomerium*, it is necessary to determine, so far as possible, the facts which are to be the basis for further argument; and though such a determination was not originally contemplated here, it has become an essential preliminary.<sup>1</sup>

In the first place, the *pomerium* was bounded on one side by a furrow and line of clods,<sup>2</sup> produced by ploughing with a bull and a cow, around the city; at the gates the plough was lifted up and the line thus broken.<sup>3</sup> Or, the *pomerium* was the furrow and ridge itself. The first question is: was this furrow, with its ridge, on the line of the city walls, or inside that line, or outside that line?

The furrow must of course have run over ground that could be ploughed; on this score it could hardly have been precisely on the line of the city walls, for they rested usually on bare rock, wherever this natural advantage for defence was at hand.

Mommsen tried to show<sup>4</sup> that the furrow ran inside the city wall, and that the *pomerium* was the space between the furrow and the wall, left free for the rapid movement and massing of troops when it became necessary to defend the city from assault. Such an open passageway was present in the Roman camp, and is seen to a certain extent at Pompeii.<sup>5</sup> But Livy,<sup>6</sup> though he thinks that the *pomerium* lay inside the

<sup>1</sup> The references to the extensive modern literature on the subject are not meant to be complete; other articles may be traced from the citations in Daremberg et Saglio, *Dict. d. antiq. gr. et rom.*, s.v. *pomerium*; J. B. Carter, *AJA.* XII (1908), 172-184; E. T. Merrill, *CP.* IV (1909), 420-432.

<sup>2</sup> The *sulcus primigenius*, Festus, 236 Mü.

<sup>3</sup> Varro, *LL.* v, 143; Dion. Hal. *AR.* I, 88; Plut. *Rom.* II; Serv. ad *Aen.* v, 755.

<sup>4</sup> *Hermes*, x (1876), 24-50, = *Röm. Forsch.* II, 23-41; Platner, *Topog. and Mon. of Ancient Rome*, 35-37.

<sup>5</sup> H. Nissen, *Pompejanische Studien*, 466-477.

<sup>6</sup> I, 44, 3-5.

wall as well as outside, seems to have personal acquaintance only with cities where the buildings abutted directly upon the wall, leaving no vacant *pomerium* space inside. Besides this, the institution of the *pomerium* is Etruscan,<sup>7</sup> while the street inside the walls of the Roman camp is an inheritance from the *terremare* villages,<sup>8</sup> and therefore distinctly Italic, *i.e.* non-Etruscan. Further, I fail to find traces of such an empty space behind the walls in any of the Etruscan cities.<sup>9</sup>

On the other hand, Richter,<sup>10</sup> Carter,<sup>11</sup> and others consider that the *pomerium* lay between the walls and a furrow outside the walls, and was primarily not a military, but a religious institution; the ridge and furrow formed in fact a symbolical *murus et fossa*,<sup>12</sup> at which the gods would stop the enemy, just as the men would stop them at the real and physical *murus et fossa* bounding the city.

Despite Mommsen and others, it seems that the evidence of classical writers is in reality in favor of this view. Livy<sup>13</sup> distinctly shows that at least a part of it lay outside the wall; and the descriptions of its location given by Gellius<sup>14</sup> and by Tacitus<sup>15</sup> distinctly set it outside any Palatine wall during much of its course, in a position which can hardly be just *inside* of any other conceivable wall which might bound and defend a city.<sup>16</sup> In fact, it is only in connection with etymo-

<sup>7</sup> Varro, *l.c.*

<sup>8</sup> Modestov, *Introduction à l'histoire romaine*, 160 et passim.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. especially the excavations at Marzabotto, near Bologna, described in *Monumenti antichi pubblicati per cura della Reale Accademia dei Lincei*, I (1889), 250 ff.

<sup>10</sup> *Topog. von Rom*,<sup>2</sup> 32 f., in v. Müller's *Hdb. d. Kl. Altertumswiss.* III, 3, 2.

<sup>11</sup> *Religion of Numa*, 33-34; *AJA.* XII (1908), 177.

<sup>12</sup> Varro, *l.c.*

<sup>13</sup> I, 44, 4-5, quoted in full later.

<sup>14</sup> XIII, 14, 2: antiquissimum autem pomerium, quod a Romulo institutum est, Palatini montis radicibus terminabatur.

<sup>15</sup> *Ann.* XII, 24: initium condendi, et quod pomerium Romulus posuerit, noscere haud absurdum reor. Igitur a foro boario, ubi aereum tauri simulacrum aspicimus, quia id genus animalium aratro subditur, sulcus designandi oppidi coeptus, ut magnam Herculis aram amplecteretur; inde certis spatiis interiecti lapides per ima montis Palatini ad aram Consi, mox curias veteres, tum ad sacellum Larum, inde forum Romanum; forumque et Capitolium non a Romulo, sed a Tito Tatío additum urbi credidere.

<sup>16</sup> Despite Platner, *l.c.*

logical remarks explaining the word as *postmerium*, that the *pomerium* is said to be behind the wall.

We may consider then that the weight of the evidence is that the *pomerium* lay outside the city walls, between the walls on the one side and the sacramental ridge and furrow on the other.<sup>17</sup>

The word *pōmērīum* is commonly interpreted<sup>18</sup> as the *\*post-moirīom*,<sup>19</sup> or *id quod post murum est*. This is readily intelligible in the light of Mommsen's view, which we have seen reason to reject; and it seems quite unintelligible if the ridge and furrow lie outside, and *pomerium* denote the space just *before* the wall. Livy,<sup>20</sup> in an effort to explain the word on this basis, suggests that the term was applicable to the space outside the wall *quod murus post id* (eset); but a compound with such a semantic development is not to be paralleled in Latin, and appears quite out of accord with the genius of the language. It is equally impossible to suppose that the prefix here means *behind* from the standpoint of those within the city walls, and therefore denotes *outside* the walls.

Another interpretation has been proposed which seems more probable: *pomerium* is the entire space back of the sacramental wall and ditch formed by the ridge and furrow, and includes the whole *urbs*,<sup>21</sup> as opposed to the *ager* which lies without; the term was later restricted to the space between the city walls and the ridge and furrow, or to the ridge and furrow itself. The objection to this lies in the prohibition of building and tillage on the space called the *pomerium*:<sup>22</sup> while a term applying to the whole city might be

<sup>17</sup> For the present paper it is of no importance whether the term *pomerium* denoted originally the strip of land or the boundary furrow, though the writer inclines to the former view. It is clear, however, that the word ordinarily denotes the strip.

<sup>18</sup> Valerius Messalla ap. Gell. XIII, 14, 1; Auct. inc. ap. Fest. 250 a 20 Mü.; Varro, *LL.* v, 143; Liv. I, 44, 4-5; Plut. *Rom.* 11.

<sup>19</sup> For the phonetic development, cf. Walde, *Lat. etym. Worth.*, s.v., with references, especially Solmsen, *IF.* IV, 251, and Brugmann, *Ber. d. sächs. Ges.* 1900, 407 a.

<sup>20</sup> I, 44, 5.

<sup>21</sup> Detlefsen, *Hermes*, XXI, 508; Richter, *l.c.*; Merrill, *CP.* IV, 428.

<sup>22</sup> Liv. I, 44, 4-5.

applied to the boundary *line*,<sup>23</sup> it is hard to see how it might be restricted to a *strip* around it, in which building was forbidden, though the term had previously meant the building space *par excellence*. The prohibition of tillage equally differentiates the *pomerium* from the land outside.

But even in ancient authors we find mention of another etymology for the word. In the Excerpts of Paulus Diaconus from Festus, p. 248 Mü., we read: Posimerium<sup>24</sup> pontificale pomoerium, ubi pontifices auspicabantur. dictum autem pomerium, quasi promurium, id est, proximum muro. The corresponding portion of the fragments of Festus with the restorations adopted by Müller, are

249 b 28

*Posime*-<sup>24</sup>

29 rium esse ait Antistius in *commentario iuris pontifi-*

30 calis pomerium, id est locum *pro muro, ut ait*

31 Cato. olim quidem omnem urbem *comprehendebat praeter*  
*Aven-*

32 tinum, nunc etiam intra aedificia *finitur. ita pomerium est*

33 quasi promerium. solet autem iis solis *dari*

34 rus pomerii proferendi, *qui . . .*

250 a 20 . . . . . *dictum existimat pomerium* veluti post moe-

21 rium, *quod agrum omnem complectitur* intro muris urbis.

Müller prefers the readings 33 promurium, 34 ius, 21 a muris.

No argument can be based on the restorations, given in italics; but even the preserved portions of the lines of Festus make clear that there were those who took the word to be *\*prōmoirium*, and not *\*postmoirium*. The *prō* theory seems traceable to Cato, and is cited by Antistius Labeo, Festus, and Paulus Diaconus; the *post* theory goes back to Valerius Messalla, and is cited by Varro, Livy, Plutarch, and Gellius. We are justified in considering the claims of the former theory, though of course we shall not take it with Paulus, as *proximum muro*. The *\*prō-moirium* is *id quod pro muro est*; and such an origin of *pomerium* is phonetically

<sup>23</sup> Cf. the converse semantic development of *finis* and *circulus*.

<sup>24</sup> The form *posimerium* defies explanation, so far as the writer can see. Should we read *postmerium* in the Pauline passage, and *promu-rium* in that of Festus?

quite possible, the *r* of the initial syllable being lost by dissimilation against the following *r*.

Dissimilation<sup>25</sup> is a fairly familiar phenomenon, though more commonly it results in change than in loss; and in cases of loss it usually affects the later occurrence of the sound rather than the prior, as in *praestrigiae* and *praestigiae*, *crebresco* and *crebesco*. Of loss of the prior occurrence, examples are seen in *siliqua* and *silex*,<sup>26</sup> with initial *sk-*; *segestrum*, borrowed from Greek *στέγαστρον*; *taberna*,<sup>26</sup> from \**trab-erna*, a derivative of *trab-s*; and vulgar *mamor* for *marmor*,<sup>27</sup> MINISTORVM for *ministrorum*.<sup>28</sup> In \**prōmoirion*, the second *r* is protected from loss both by its intervocalic position<sup>29</sup> and by the influence of *murus*; at the same time, the loss of the first *r* thoroughly disguises the *prō*—but the same is true of *trab-s* in *tab-erna*.

If now this be the true origin of the word *pomerium*, how did the word come to be so misunderstood by the ancients? A possible theory is the following: the *po-* of *pomerium* no longer suggested *pro* to the Roman mind, especially as the failure to advance the *pomerium* regularly when the city walls were advanced<sup>30</sup> naturally completed the separation of the two words; the analogy of *pomeridianus* and *postmeridianus*<sup>31</sup> warranted the meaning *post* for a prefix *po-*, and from this came the interpretation of *pomerium* as \**postmoirion*. An etymological science which permitted the derivation of *lucus a non lucendo*,<sup>32</sup> could see no difficulty in explaining as *id quod post murum erat*, the *pomerium* which lay *pro muro*.

Livy<sup>33</sup> evidently does not feel that the matter may be so

<sup>25</sup> Stolz u. Schmalz, *Lat Gram.*<sup>4</sup> § 66, § 39, in v. Müller's *Hdb. d. kl. Altertumswiss.* II; Sommer, *Hdb. d. lat. Laut- u. Formenlehre*, § 163, A 2.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Walde, *op. cit.*, s.vv.

<sup>27</sup> Pomp. v, 283 Keil.

<sup>28</sup> *CIL.* x, 825.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Grammont, *La dissimilation consonantique*, 16, 4°.

<sup>30</sup> Liv. I, 44, 5; Gell. XIII, 14; cf. Merrill, *CP.* iv, 428 ff.

<sup>31</sup> Cic. *Or.* 157.

<sup>32</sup> Varro, *LL.*, p. 240, 6 ed. Goetz et Schoell.

<sup>33</sup> I, 44, 3-5: *aggere et fossis et muro circumdat urbem: ita pomerium profert. pomerium, verbi vim solam intuentes, postmoerium interpretantur esse: est autem magis circamoerium, locus, quem in condendis urbibus quondam Etrusci, qua murum ducturi erant, certis terminis inaugurato consecrabant, ut neque interiore parte aedificia moenibus continuarentur, quae nunc vulgo etiam coniungunt, et extrinsecus puri aliquid ab humano cultu pateret soli. hoc spa-*

summarily disposed of; he accepts the view that the *pomerium* is etymologically *postmerium*, that is, *\*postmoirion*, though it denoted only a space before the wall, and seeks to explain the inconsistency. The *pomerium* is rather a *circa-moerium*, he says, running on both sides of the wall; on the inside no houses might be built contiguous with the wall, and on the outside a strip was left free from the plough. Apparently he means that the name was at first appropriate only to the strip lying inside, and was afterward transferred to the strip outside. But he is troubled by the fact that in his day the houses inside the wall did normally run quite to the wall and join it; so fearing that his explanation may not carry conviction, he adds another, that the name was appropriate both to the space inside and to the space outside: the space inside was *post murum*, and the *murum* was *post* the space outside.<sup>34</sup> That *pomerium* means *id quod murum post se habet*, is, as has already been remarked, to assume a semantic relation unknown in compounds in the Latin language. Livy is merely trying to show how a word apparently meaning 'what is back of the wall,' may be the name for 'what is in front of the wall.'

If accordingly we interpret the word *pōmērion* as *\*prō-moirion*, 'that which lies before the wall,' it accords perfectly with what seems to be the historic value of the term: a strip of land extending around the city just outside the wall, bounded on the other side by the ceremonial ridge and furrow. One set of ancient authorities explained it in this way; another group took it to be *\*post-moirion*, but the considerations which misled them are perhaps still determinable.

tium, quod neque habitari neque arari fas erat, non magis quod post murum esset, quam quod murus post id, pomerium Romani appellarunt, et in urbis incremento semper, quantum moenia processura erant, tantum termini hi consecrati proferebantur.

<sup>34</sup> Plut. *Rom.* 11, *πωμήριον, ὅλον ὁπισθεν τείχους ἢ μετὰ τείχος*, seems to have almost the same idea as Livy.